[73] In the Guajiro mentality sickness, as we were able to see in the corresponding sections ("Medicine and Sickness" and "Life Cycle of the Shaman"), is not something provoked by natural causes but is the consequence of the malevolent action of some special being, above all, of a spirit. So a series of beliefs, magic preventatives, have been established in order to avoid or ward off the hostile action of these spirits on the individual, as we were able to note in the chapter "Sickness and Medicine." We also saw in the matter relating to magic and sickness how certain animals, plants, and objects could be agents by contamination or participation in the cause and development of sickness. But it is particularly the spirit of the dead, offended and malevolent, that causes major disasters among the Guajiro, as is shown by their beliefs and their own preventative systems.

We can get aid from linguistics to clarify this concept. The word that the Guajiro uses for illness in general is wanurú, and the same word is the one that is used for the spirit of the dead – the devil, according to all writers and even to the natives themselves, due to the effects of religious acculturation provoked by the Capuchin fathers. Still further, if we break down the word we find that it is formed of three special particles, wa, num ru, which separately correspond to three different concepts: Wa is derived from the first person plural of the personal pronoun wayá, which means "we"; nu, or simply n, is nothing more than the general contraction of the third person singular of the personal pronoun niá, "he," and rú is a relative particle derived from surú or hurú (s or h according to which dialectal zone the word is taken from), which signifies "inside," "inside of," or "within." In view of the idiomatic composition of the Guajiro dialect, we can with all safety translate the word wanurú as follows: "he, inside of us." The linguistic construction therefore corresponds to a social reality: sickness, wanurú, is nothing more than that: the spirit of the dead that has entered an individual in order to cause him a particular illness for some disrespect or other that he has shown toward the spirit, or simply just because it is a malignant and vindictive spirit.

The relation sickness – death – spirit, which will later be the object of a special study on our part, can be proved through linguistics in many of the aboriginal Colombian and even American